

The International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies and the US Fish & Wildlife Service established guidelines to supplement the eight required elements (Appendix A). These guidelines provided recommendations across four topics related to the development process: Planning Processes and Partnerships; Focus and Scope; Format and Content; and Completion, Outcomes, and Availability. States were encouraged to use these guidelines, both in the initial development process, and during future revisions, to improve and strengthen their Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategies.

State Overview

In North Carolina, a huge diversity of fish and wildlife habitats exist across the three distinctive regions of the state: the Coastal Plain, the Piedmont, and the Mountains. These regions fall within larger ecoregions that span state borders and link North Carolina to neighboring states (Figure 1.1). Elevations ranging from sea level to over 6,000 feet provide habitat for over 1,000 species of birds, mammals, fish, reptiles, amphibians, mollusks, and crustaceans, in addition to thousands of other invertebrate species.

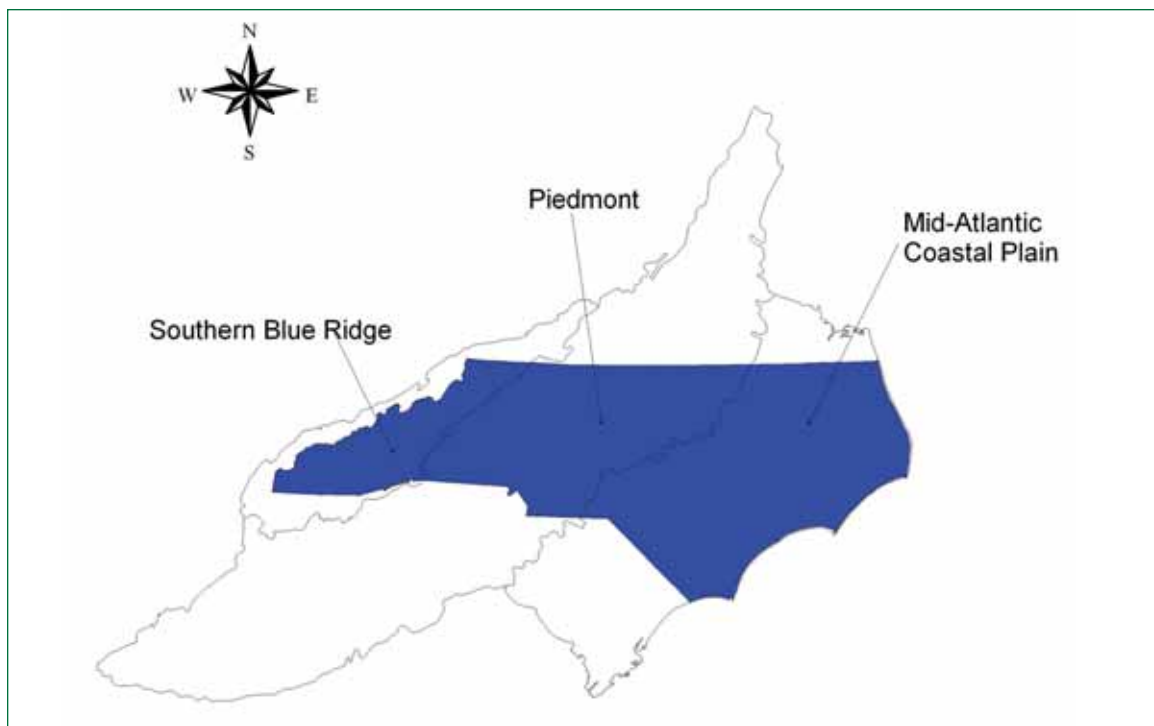


Figure 1.1. Ecoregional delineations in North Carolina (data source: NC GAP; ecoregions as defined by Bailey 1995).

The Coastal Plain region is characterized by flat lands extending from the coast inland an average of 125 miles. Elevations in the region increase inland at approximately one foot per mile. The region covers almost two-fifths of the area of the state. The central Piedmont begins west of the coastal plain, separated by the “fall line” (a distinctive landscape change thought to have been the location of the shoreline thousands of years ago). The Piedmont is characterized by rolling hills ranging from 150–1,000 feet in elevation; the region covers another two-fifths of the state. The Mountain region, covering one-fifth of the state, is marked by numerous mountain ranges within the Southern Appalachians (principally the Blue Ridge and the Great Smoky Mountains). Forty-three peaks exceed 6,000 feet in elevation; 80 peaks exceed 5,000 feet.

The state of North Carolina is approximately 84% privately owned; this figure emphasizes the key role that private landowners play in determining the fate of the state’s natural resources (NRCS 1997). Habitat degradation and loss due to development associated with human population growth are among the most threatening impacts to fish and wildlife species across the state. According to